

## DL E-tivity 3 Assessment

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Module title: Post Cold War World Order

Module code and presentation: PL7508 S09

Date: 30 October 2009

Marker: Nick Wright

### CONTENT

#### Article chosen

Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations', *Foreign Affairs*, summer 1993

#### Critique

In Huntington's assessment of history since the Peace of Westphalia, conflict mutated from war among princes, to war among nations and, with the advent of the Cold War, to ideological divisions; all of which occurred within Western civilization and between nation states. In the present, the fundamental source of conflict is cultural, its actors being groups of different civilizations and not necessarily nation states. Conflict in the modern world, Huntington foresees, will occur between civilizations and not within Western civilization.

Comment [r1]: Nice, clear introduction

In this context, the most instructive way to see the world is in terms of culture, not politics or economics. The conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating civilizations from one another. Huntington predicts this for the following reasons: civilizational differences run deep and shape different world views that are not easily changed; interactions between civilizations are increasing and intensifying differences; economic modernization and social change have weakened national identities and the void left has been filled by religion and intractable fundamentalist movements; civilization-consciousness is engendering a turning inward and the willingness to confront the West; cultural characteristics and especially religious differences are less mutable than political and economic ones, making compromise difficult; and last, economic regionalism is increasing and stands in the way of global economic integration. All of these engender hostility and animosity between civilizations and will eventually lead to conflict.

As the political and ideological divisions of the Cold War disappeared, the fault lines between civilizations replaced them as flashpoints for trouble. Wherever one looks, cultural differences exacerbate conflict, especially along the borders of the Islamic world, sustain double standards, increase "kin-country" rallying, and foreshadow an inter-civilizational world war.

The world today is characterized by a large gap in power and culture between the West and the "Rest", which allows the former to impose its will on the latter through political, economic or military coercion. This supremacy is challenged by the Confucian-Islamic axis, which grows in strength and cannot be contained indefinitely through arms controls and non-proliferation treaties.

The implications for the West are serious. To mitigate them, Huntington suggests the West should in the short-term strengthen unity across Western civilization and with Japan, maintain military superiority, and promote greater involvement of non-Western states in international institutions. In the long-term, it should increasingly accommodate non-Western civilizations while also seeking elements of commonality on which to build a peaceful coexistence.

## Comments on peers' assessments

### Dialogue with Group

I could not abstain from making the following comment about Huntington's article that I have analysed above.

Huntington overestimates the reach of culture and the breadth of cultural divisions while downplaying or downright ignoring the depth of human nature and the universal traits and instincts that bind human beings everywhere. There are fundamental human principles that transcend culture and trump cultural idiosyncrasies many times over.

**Comment [r2]:** Good criticism – shame it was not in the original posting!

They, however, cannot be invoked so long as nation states shape and control public opinion and set the tone for how they interact with the international community. They are also being hampered by the West's "naïve dogmatism" (Howard, 2009) in the way it employs military power, by its pursuit of global policies with the sole aim of maintaining a master-slave relationship with the world, and by the economic exploitation and superior status that constitute the West's main motivation and ultimate objective. Finally, they can also not be invoked so long as the "Rest" succumb to tribalism, superstitions and ignorance.

**Comment [r3]:** Good quote

Culturally inspired behaviours can be disarmed by decoupling the individual consciousness from the collective nation and its Zeitgeist. The individual would then be freed to act according to his or her elementary and fundamental human consciousness and not seduced by the conditioned norms of acquired cultural behaviour and/or self-centred political objectives. NGOs offer a living example of this kind of humanism and cosmopolitanism in action.

**Comment [r4]:** Very interesting point

This, however, can only be done in a global political framework where all participants are considered equal – regardless of economic or military prowess – and allowed to express and add their voices to the decision making process; in other words, only if there is a "democratic minimum" that allows individuals to "initiate democratic deliberation" within a "properly instituted transnational democracy" (Bohman, 2005). As long as the West dictates and the "Rest" follows, the world will be unable to tap into the traits that bind us as human beings and will be blinded and deceived by the differences that separate us as citizens, coreligionists, and cultural members.

Rigidity in international relations due to suspicions and mistrust, economic advantage and cultural arrogance must give way to a supple and accommodating system that embraces all with honesty and decency and with the intent to treat others as one would like to be treated oneself.

### Dialogue with Group

Here is something Huntington missed and the world seems to be oblivious to even though it is staring us in the face. I see the war on terror as the clash of fanatics: economic fundamentalists, the Americans, on one side, and religious fundamentalists, the Arabs, on the other.

For historical reasons the world is controlled along three broad factions each with its own emphasis: the Jewish economic prowess, the Christian military prowess, and the Arab religious prowess. Each civilization has staked its ground in one of these domains and are clashing because they see the world distorted through the prism of their particular domain.

**Comment [r5]:** Shouldn't we be careful of broad categorisations?

Notably, and this is something no one seems to talk about, conflict occurs within this grand brotherhood of monotheists. Fundamentally, they are squabbling for the right to promote their own versions of God's ultimate truth. Unless and until the delusion of knowing the will of God disappears from the hearts of the world's monotheists, humankind will not know peace.

**Comment [r6]:** Always? Perhaps this requires some qualification.

Buddhists, Jains, Confucians, Hindus and other lesser religions are not engaged in the bitter ideological disputes occurring within monotheism and are not attempting to shape the world in their own image. Therefore, there is no greater threat to world peace and no greater impediment to international cooperation and to global integration than the intransigence of monotheistic religions.

**Comment [r7]:** Quite a polemical statement!

### Dialogue with Ali

Hi Ali,

I want to begin by mentioning that we are very lucky to have you in our group. As the only Arab (and, I assume, Muslim) among us you will be able to bring in the other side of the story and to

reflect the true opinions of your surrounding environment about the issues we are discussing. I hope you will be unencumbered by your solitude in this course and that you will fearlessly express your views, however controversial they may seem to a Western audience. Please do not fall prey to the virulent political correctness that is currently corrupting and corroding every aspect of Western society. I would rather you offend us so that we may learn the truth, then that you protect us so that we may maintain superficial civility. In return, I promise to be just as forthcoming expressing the truth from my perspective and just as brave with exposing my true feelings: for only then shall we have a constructive and revealing learning experience. I believe all our colleagues will second my entreaty and will add their assurances that for the sake of truth and for academic expression we shall be infinitely tolerable of each other's prejudices.

By the way, as an Eastern European from a region of Romania that was under Ottoman control for 500 years, I, along with our Turkish colleague in the course, straddle the Western and Islamic civilizations that history has shown us to often be at odds with one another, the present finds at loggerheads, and Huntington predicts will continue to be at war in the foreseeable future. As such, you will find that my ideals, ideas and norms are as different from those of my Western European colleagues as yours may be. On the other hand, being raised in a communist society and adhering to no religious beliefs, I may be the one out in this group and as remote from you, a Muslim (I assume), as from all others who may or may not be practicing Christians.

Now on to my remarks about Philip Gordon's "Can the War on Terror be Won?"

Gordon makes a very important contribution to understanding the conflict and mapping the future by analysing Muslim public opinion. He remarks that there are "*signs of a Muslim backlash against al Qaeda's use of wanton violence as a political tool*" and looks at public opinion polls in Jordan, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia post-Al Qaeda attacks to support this assertion and to conclude that "*support for jihadists will eventually erode*".

He goes on to quote the findings of the political scientist and pollster Shibley Telhami, whose data reveals that "*many people would like bin Laden... to hurt America*" but "*they do not want bin Laden to rule their children*". When asked "*what, if any, aspects of al Qaeda they sympathized with*", 33% of Muslim respondents said none, 33% said its confronting the United States, 14% said its support for Muslim causes such as the Palestinian movement, 11% said its methods of operation, and just 7% said its efforts to create an Islamic state."

Finally, Gordon recognizes the importance of independent cable stations such as Qatar-based al Jazeera and Dubai-based al Arabiya as representing the true voice of the Arab world since they are not beholden to a particular state and are therefore free of state propaganda. He quotes the Arab media expert Marc Lynch who points that the commentators of these independent media stations criticise, mock and "*regularly dismiss the existing Arab regimes as useless, self-interested, weak, compromised, corrupt, and worse*." Interestingly, when an al Jazeera talk show addressed the issue of Arab governments having become worse than colonialism, "*the host, one of the guests, and 76% of the callers said yes*", which, according to Marc Lynch, marks "*a degree of frustration and inwardly directed anger that presents an opening for progressive change*."

What these polls and developments reveal and imply about the Arab world is, in my opinion, priceless for understanding what to do about the looming civilizational conflict Huntington warns us about in his article "The Clash of Civilizations?" and is not just instrumental, as Gordon has recognized, for forging the right strategy for winning the war on terror. I identify them as follows:

1. The Muslim world is as divided as ever.
2. It is ready and thirsty for change.
3. It hates the regimes that govern it more than or as much as the United States.
4. It hates the United States for supporting these regimes and thus stifling change from within.
5. It is caught between three unwanted choices: continuing with their corrupt and subservient governments, supporting an unappealing brand of extremist Islam, or succumbing to an equally unappealing future at the mercy of the West.
6. Being thus caught between a rock, an anvil, and a hard stone, they welcome the mutual destruction of Al Qaeda and America as a window of escape from the status quo.

The secret to a wise American policy towards the Middle East in particular and the Islamic world in general lies within these revelations. Gordon has astutely extrapolated a set of actions that would ensure America's success in the war on terror. The most important elements of this strategy, as I see it, being: (1) that America expands "*its efforts to promote education and political*

**Comment [r8]:** Does this not risk making assumptions about what Ali may or may not think?

**Comment [r9]:** Again, you are placing a degree of conditionality on his responses, however well intended.

**Comment [r10]:** Good quotation

*and economic change in the Middle East, which in the long run will help the region overcome the despair and humiliation that fuel the terrorist threat”; and (2) that it stops pretending “that the conflict between Israel and its neighbours has nothing to do with the problem of terrorism and launch a diplomatic offensive designed to bring an end to a conflict that is a key source of the resentment that motivates many terrorists.”* By choosing this course of action, Gordon asserts, the Muslim world will give birth to a generation of moral and political leaders who “*will seek to put their civilization on a path toward restoring the glory of its greatest era – when the Muslim world was a multicultural zone of tolerance and intellectual, artistic, and scientific achievement.*”

And this is where I would like to take Gordon’s thinking a step further by envisioning not just a path to American victory against extremist Islamism but a path to peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence between the West and the Muslim world. The first will only embitter and further humiliate the Muslim world unless it is followed by the latter, which alone can empower the people of the Muslim crescent to rise to new heights and to equal status to the West.

For this to occur, this is best done, as with individuals, by helping the Muslim world reach its highest potential. Muslims recognize that the heyday of their civilization occurred when the Muslim world was united by the Caliphate. If the case of Europe is any indication, the best way in which to build cohesion and consensus is through greater political and economic integration under the auspices of a transnational body such as the European Union. Such blocks are being forged across the world mostly for economic but also for political purposes. The Muslim world is the only geopolitical zone that lags behind in this respect, even though it started earlier than most (the Arab League was formed in 1945 and to date has 22 members, but has little to show for it), which is in no small part due to Western influence.

The West must therefore reverse course. Instead of conniving to keep the Islamic world in general and the Arab countries in particular divided and imprisoned by secular nationalist or monarchical governments, it must use its muscle and influence to help the Muslim world unite under the auspices of a Pan-Islamic body that is the equal in scope to the European Union. Call it the Islamic Democratic Caliphate, if you want, to rob the fundamentalists of the pretence that they alone can bring unity to the Muslim world and to ensure that democracy and not autocracy is its modus operandi, and that the rule of law and human rights not Sharia law and cruelty prevail.

I state the following as compelling reasons to pursue this course:

1. It will show that the West does not want the East to be weak, poor and subordinate but strong, flourishing and independent.
2. It will drown the forces of tribalism and nepotism that divide and weaken the Muslim world into the great ocean of Muslim pan-Islamist brotherhood, as envisioned by the likes of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and not Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb, Abul Ala Maududi, or Ayatollah Khomeini.
3. It will galvanise the people of the Muslim world to look to the promising future and not hearken back to the glorious past.
4. It will ensure that religion is contained by secularism and that there is a clear division between religion and the state so that political self-determination trumps blind submission to the will of god in the political realm.
5. It will show that the Judeo-Christian world acknowledges the kinship of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad as equal manifestations of divine purpose and Muslims as equal partners in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition of monotheism.
6. It will straightjacket the proselytizing instincts and tendencies of Islam with a strong legal framework that is based on a modern interpretation of Sharia that can be subsumed by the universal legal code of UN International Law.
7. It will allow the Muslim world’s religious orientation to harness its own Weltanschauung to positive secular and universal goals.
8. It will annihilate the existing fundamentalist and extremist tendencies within Islam by exhausting them in the internal fight for cohesion and consensus that a large and bureaucratic pan-Islamic confederation would necessitate.

The way I see it, this is the only way in which to avoid inter-civilizational conflict.

## COMMENTS

Kevin, you have fulfilled the criteria for this e-tivity, posting a 400-word text analysis and responding to the work of your peers, in this case Ali's.

*Text critique* – a good summary of Huntington's key points and you demonstrate here and in your subsequent postings an excellent understanding of what he is arguing. I would like to have seen more critical engagement with the article, however. You did do this well in a later posting, but it would have been better incorporated here. Whether or not you find it convincing, it is important to test his thesis for weaknesses – for example, do cultural differences and tensions really foreshadow and inter-civilisational world war as he suggests? Is this inevitable? What is his rationale for arguing such a point, etc? Demonstrating an ability to critique a text even if you generally agree with it makes your arguments stronger.

*Dialogue with Group* – you developed and augmented your original posting with two further postings which sought to engage the group with some of the wider themes related to Huntington's "Clash of Civilisations" thesis. Overall, these contributions were of a very high quality, demonstrating considerable thought and analytical skill and an effort to draw together many different perspectives. It is a shame that the critique of Huntington came here and not in the original posting, and also you have a tendency to lapse into a polemical style on occasion, but this seems to demonstrate your passion for the topic more than anything else.

*Dialogue with Ali* – the basis of this posting was a good analysis of Gordon's article followed by a compelling effort to chart an alternative course of action for Western policy. You demonstrate again a great understanding of the issues involved and an ability to draw these together in a convincing argument. However, I would advise against the sweeping statements and assumptions that appeared in your opening paragraphs. Whilst well-intended, they place a degree of conditionality on all those who might wish to respond, and risk pre-judging those responses. We can be passionate in our arguments without compromising objectivity. Also the length of this posting, while admirable in its depth and detail, is problematic. In general such long postings tend to discourage other participants, when the aim is to promote debate. It would have been better broken up into smaller sections as part of wider discussion and some elements could have been posted as part of the discussion forum for Week 5's reading.

Overall, you cannot be faulted on the enthusiasm and commitment you have shown to this e-tivity. Your input here – and in the forums – has been of a very high standard indeed. Well done.

OVERALL E-TIVITY MARK

4/5